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Spirits Immortal in and out of Time

The Temporality of Milton's Angels in *Paradise Lost*

Milton's angelic hosts provide a major structural counterpoint to the destiny of humans. This essay examines their world and fate specifically from the point of view of their existence in time. Angels are immortal, but they are not eternal beings. The annihilation of angels is not beyond God's power. Despite similarities in their prelapsarian condition, angels and humans do not share a common destiny. Unlike the fall of humans, the fall of angels is temporally irreversible. Milton maintains a complex duality with respect to the fallen angels in that they are simultaneously fallen into, and out of, time. On the one hand, they are locked up in time and their own existence, unable to pass through the ultimate remedy, death. On the other hand, they have abused their freedom and are therefore outside time, which is no longer a potentiality for them, either to fall or to be redeemed. Cut off from God and thrown back on their own resources, the devils produce a closed, circular world. Their memories are clouded and confused, but it is part of their punishment that they should remember while they have no reliable knowledge of the future. At the heart of their enterprise is a subjective and manipulative reinterpretation of the past, with disastrous consequences for the present and the future. In the allegory of Sin, Milton provides a rather surprising counterpoint to infernal self-deception. While the analysis is carried out from the perspective of temporality, the result is a complex picture of a cluster of concepts that are central to Milton's epic like time, eternity, createdness, knowledge, hierarchy, and freedom.

There is time in Milton's heaven,¹ yet his angels do not seem to be subject to it in the way humans are temporal beings. "With the angels, time is essentially the variety and rhythm of experience," says Northrop Frye, and he soon adds, "The experience of time by Adam is similar."² The crucial difference is perhaps not between angelic

1. See my "Time in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *The AnaChronisT* 1 (1995) 89–105.

2. Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (1965; Toronto and Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 36.

and human, but between prelapsarian and fallen time although I will show that in terms of the latter, there is an all-decisive difference between the two rational orders of creation. Crucially, Adam and Eve became mortal with the fall, and bequeath that to their children. Angels, by contrast, remain immortal even in their sin. What they make of time and their own immortality will be two fundamental questions discussed in this paper.

Angels created immortal

Angels do not live in a timeless world; they have particular ages. Disguised Satan “a stripling cherub . . . appears, / Not of the prime, yet such as in his face / Youth smiled celestial” (iii.636–38)³ while Michael’s “helm unbuckled showed him prime / In manhood where youth ended” (xi.245–46). As Raphael’s age is not indicated (and in fact both the above instances are linked with fallenness), Kathleen Swaim can make the contrasting point that “even so small a detail as the specification of a particular age for Michael . . . reflects the intrusion of temporal categories into the fallen world.”⁴ Unfortunately, the observation only holds within the limited context of the comparison between the two heavenly instructors. At the gate of paradise, next to Gabriel “exercised heroic games / The unarmed *youth of heaven*” (iv.551–52, my emphasis). Zephon also gave Satan a “grave rebuke / Severe in *youthful beauty*” (iv.844–45, my italics). The age distinction of angels, it must be allowed, is probably no more than a token of their position in the celestial hierarchy: a literal rendering of their juniority or seniority.⁵

Whether or not they actually age, angels cannot normally die. The bard calls them “spirits immortal” (ii.553) even in their fallenness. The full picture emerges from Raphael’s account of the war in heaven. We learn that whatever injury it sustains, “the ethereal substance [is] / Not long divisible” (vi.330–31) and soon heals. Angels are “spirits that live throughout / Vital in every part” (vi.344–45), and “their

3. All parenthesised references are to this edition: John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667, 2nd ed. 1674), ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow etc.: Longman, 1998). Editorial material is quoted as Fowler² followed by page number and line reference. The first edition of 1968 will be quoted, from a 1991 reprint that excludes the rest of Milton’s poetry, as Fowler¹.

4. Kathleen Swaim, *Before and After the Fall: Contrasting Modes in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986) 9.

5. The possible double interpretation of iii.637 as “prime of life” or “chief cherubim” supports this view. See Fowler², p. 208 (ad iii.636–37).

liquid texture mortal wound [cannot] / Receive" (vi.348–49). And yet, they can "by annihilating die" (vi.347). Despite the obvious textual evidence, Fowler holds that "M[ilton] thought God unable to annihilate anything."⁶ Helen Gardner agrees, "God is a creator and cannot destroy what he has created, for that would be contradiction of his essential being." She is right in the particular context she is writing about. "[T]he terror of his [the Son's] countenance drives the rebels before him. They are not destroyed. They are rooted out of Heaven."⁷ But I think both authors overstate the case here, generalising from other sources and loci. I am not suggesting that Milton envisioned the actual extermination of any creature, but the possibility, at least theoretical, of annihilation, whatever it may be, seems to me quite important for his overall purpose.

In fact, in Gardner's context, too, that possibility is asserted even as its actuality is denied. Driving out the rebels from heaven "as a herd / Of goats or timorous flock" (vi.856–57), "half his strength he [the Son] put not forth, but checked / His thunder in mid-volley, for he meant / Not to destroy" (vi.853–55). In other words, he could have destroyed, had he deployed all his thunder. Again, as the celestial choir hails the returning Jehova for the six days' work, because "to create / Is greater than created to destroy" (vii.606–07), it implicitly affirms the possibility of divine destruction. Sin also warns Satan that Death's "mortal dint, / Save he who reigns above, none can resist" (ii.813–14). The threat works, and we have no proof positive that it was more than a mere bluff, but as I shall argue at the end of this paper, we have no reason to doubt Sin's claim here. Death's dart is stronger than Satan. It cannot be otherwise for creation cannot impose a limit on God's sovereign freedom; he⁸ must not be objectively bound by his own creation. The ability to completely undo what he has created must be within his power. Otherwise, his actions would be temporally constrained because irreversible.⁹ God would not be truly eternal. There is a distinction to be drawn between eternity and immortality. Creation on the one hand, and the possibility of annihilation on the other, mark off the limits of the latter from the former. And

6. Fowler², p. 68 (ad i.116–17). He does not comment on my prooftext (vi.347).

7. Helen Gardner, *A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 70.

8. I adhere to Milton's and the critical guild's convention of using masculine pronouns for God with the understanding that all human language about God is to some extent metaphorical. Masculine pronouns are not meant to entail statements about God's ontological genderedness.

9. See Catherine Gimelli Martin, "Fire, Ice, and Epic Entropy: The Physics and Metaphysics of Milton's Reformed Chaos," *Milton Studies* 35 (1997) 73–113, p. 79 for her parsing of reversibility and irreversibility between the created and the divine realms.

knowledge of both marks off the good angels from the bad ones. It would be a mistake to consider Raphael's doctrine fallacious. On the contrary, he gets it right and thereby supplies an indispensable retrospective benchmark to evaluate an important class of arguments in the infernal council, to which I will return later. We shall see that the doctrine of uncreation shows up at decisive points in the epic. First, however, we must consider what perspectives the loyal angels have on past and future.

The unspoiled memory of angels exhibits qualities similar to those of unfallen human memory.¹⁰ Most notably, Raphael's narration, besides all other merits, is an impressive demonstration of just how powerful that faculty of the angels is. Obviously, not all knowledge presented by Raphael can come from first-hand experience. He was absent on the sixth day of creation yet he can give an exhaustive exposition of all the happenings of that day.¹¹ The most plausible explanation as to where Raphael acquired the missing information from to fill all the gaps¹² is that probably God instructed him. An epitome of the lesson is given in v.233–43. Moreover, in vi.769 Raphael himself drops an aside identifying his source. Talking about the chariots of God, he gives a figure, "twenty thousand," and immediately adds in parentheses, "I their number heard." His prodigious memory can thus retain not only personal experience in tremendous detail but also casually acquired second-hand information. But he is not the only one among the angels who is endowed with good memory. Ithuriel and Zephon, returning to Gabriel from their mission, "brief related whom they brought, where found, / How busied, in what form and posture couched" (iv.875–76). This summary rendering on the narrator's part bears witness to the authenticity of the report. Its truth value is confirmed a little later by no less authority than God himself in a likewise concise manner (v.226–27). The allusions are definitive and so, indirectly, affirm the correctness of the original rendition. Gabriel fleetingly mentions Satan's fall (iv.905), but he could probably recall the whole story just as Uriel is able to recite a creation narrative, albeit in a much condensed version, to disguised Satan (iii.708–21). The irony is that unaware of the hypocrisy, Uriel introduces his recollections by stating the theoretical purpose of all such recollections, "wonderful indeed are all his works, / Pleasant to know, and worthiest to be all / Had in remembrance always with delight" (iii.702–04). It is, of course, wasted on Satan, whose sole interest lies in the practical information of direction, but, hope-

10. Cf. iv.449–91, v.30–93 (Eve), and viii.250–520 (Adam).

11. Cf. vii.449–550 and viii.229–46.

12. They include, in addition to the one already mentioned, e.g. the proceedings in Satan's camp during the nights of the rebellion or the hopes and thoughts of certain characters.

fully, not on the reader. On one reading, the whole epic is just such a memory aid, keeping God's works before the mind's eye.

For humans, God's command is the most important thing to remember;¹³ the vital issue for angels to recall is their own beginning. In this regard, Abdiel is the exemplary angel. His story is embedded in Raphael's narration, which elevates it to the level of universal truth. If Raphael repeats Abdiel's words approvingly, the opinion of the latter is confirmed and can be seen as the view generally held by the good angels. Abdiel asserts three times in his exchange with Satan before his flight that the rebellious angel was created by God.¹⁴ In the first two instances, he states his point in a generic context: God "made / Thee what thou art, and formed the powers of heaven / Such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being" (v.823–25). While as far as I am aware, no angel ever says in the course of *Paradise Lost* in the first person that he is created by God, the personal implications of Abdiel's collective testimony are obvious. The good angels are aware that their existence springs from God, nor do they anywhere pretend to remember things from before their creation. This is in marked contrast with Satan, whose heresy is indeed to deny his creation, on the grounds of lack of memory from before, and claim co-eternity with God.

Prelapsarian intelligences may have flawless memory, but they have no certain knowledge of the future. Angels are often portrayed as guessing at what is to come and not infrequently as making false predictions. The most conspicuous examples arise in the course of the war in heaven. Michael hopes, as he sees Satan approach, "to end / Intestine war in heaven, the arch-foe subdued / Or captive dragged in chains" (vi.258–60). When it comes to actual fighting, he aims at determining the duel with a single blow. But he must be disappointed in his expectations. His stroke apparently ends the duel but certainly not the war. Abdiel, too, has undergone a similar sobering experience. He thought "That he who in debate of truth hath won, / Should win in arms, in both disputes alike / Victor" (vi.122–24), but his mighty stroke does not finish Satan, the foe is still to show "that day / Prodigious power" (vi.246–47).¹⁵ Yet victory he has won and it turns out to be no fleeting glory, for the Son will finally win it for him.

13. Cf. vi.912, viii.323–28, x.12–13. Prelapsarian memory is a God-given gift sufficient to preserve humans in the state of innocence.

14. Cf. v.823–24, 836–37, 894.

15. Cf. Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1971) pp. 186–87, and William G. Madsen, *From Shadowy Types to Truth: Studies in Milton's Symbolism* (New Haven etc.: Yale UP, 1968) 112.

Abdiel's most important prediction of the future dates from a day earlier. On quitting Satan's camp he said to the archfiend:

I see thy fall
Determined, and thy hapless crew involved
In this perfidious fraud, contagion spread
Both of thy crime and punishment. . . (v.878–81)

This was accurate foreknowledge of what was to ensue. Abdiel, and this is the important point, could foresee that with his eyes of faith. He had no secret knowledge; he was not privy to God's plans. His surprise at "war in procinct" (vi.19) on his arrival back at the courts of God proves that beyond doubt. He also had a previous sketch of a possible future, given in the form of urging Satan to repent.

Cease then this impious rage
And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
The incensed Father, and the incensed Son,
While pardon may be found in time besought. (v.845–48)

I accept this as a plausible alternative scenario, no less true than the second, finally realised. Both are correct in the only meaningful sense of the word, for the single context in which they can be legitimately interpreted is that of obedience. Satan's obduracy does not disprove the first version but renders it meaningless by robbing it of the only context in which it could be understood. Similarly, Raphael's two, apparently contradictory, anticipations of human history can also be clarified in the framework of loyalty to God. The angel, who is faithful and has therefore clear vision of the future, describes the potential course of unfallen history culminating in humanity's ascension to the ethereal realm, ending with his famous clause "If ye be found obedient" (v.501). Exactly one book later, while recounting the invention of gunpowder during the war in heaven, he delineates fallen human history:

yet haply of thy race
In future days, if malice should abound,
Some one intent on mischief, or inspired
With devilish machination might devise
Like instrument to plague the sons of men
For sin, on war and mutual slaughter bent. (vi.501–06)

Disturbing though it may seem that Raphael has a faulty conception of the future in conjecturing about sinless development for humans, or that the postlapsarian

world is postulated in prelapsarian eden, neither is the case. Both alternatives are valid, and both prove so: the latter in actuality, the former in its potentiality confirmed by God (vi.154–61).

Very simply, as with humans before the fall, foreknowledge is given on condition of obedience. Raphael is a loyal angel and is therefore granted prescience. The content of his knowledge, once more, depends on faithfulness, this time on Adam's. The realisation of the potential alternatives will be the result of the realisation of his unbroken obedience. Sadly for us, he ended up the wrong way, but that fact does not infringe on Raphael's credibility. The foreknowledge of angels is a matter of faith and obedience to God. Insofar as they abide these limits, their knowledge of the future is complete and accurate. Thus are Michael's and Abdiel's hopes fulfilled by the Son's triumph over Satan. Insofar as they break those limits, they are no longer good angels but fallen ones, whose foreknowledge is altogether a different matter.

Satanic predicament: locked up in time

There is a noteworthy analogy between the angelic and the human condition "in the beginning." Just as Adam's freedom was constituted on the day of his creation by God's command to "shun to taste" "the tree whose operation brings / Knowledge of good and ill" (viii.327, 323–24), so are the angels given the law on the day of the anointing to "confess him [the Son] Lord [and] / Under his great vicegerent reign [to] abide" (v.608–09). Significantly, both decrees threaten punishment on "the day" they are violated.¹⁶ It is these positive laws that constitute creaturely freedom in *Paradise Lost* by endowing time with significance. There is a further parallel between the two ontological orders in that the temptation and fall of both can be seen in temporal terms. The big difference appears in the consequences. For the immortal angels, the punishment is to be "cast out from God and blessed vision," a fall "Into utter darkness," their "place / Ordained without redemption, without end" (v.613–15); for humans, it is death, which will ultimately also be a means of, and a way to, deliverance. Angelic fall is temporally irreversible; human fall is not. Or as Jackson Cope put it, "The fall of angels is literal; the fall of man metaphoric."¹⁷ I will argue in this section that the fall of Satan and his followers is in an important sense a fall *into* time, which then becomes an inescapable prison for them.

16. See v.611–15 and viii.329–31; cf. ix.762–63; x.48–53, 210–11, 771–73, 852–54, 1049–50; xi.272–73, and also Frye, p. 33.

17. Jackson I. Cope, "Time and Space as Miltonic Symbol," *ELH* 26 (1959) 497–513, p. 502.

In Milton's scheme, Satan's rebellion is provoked by the Son's anointing. Unable to distinguish between literal and metaphoric begetting, between intra-trinitarian event and its revelation in time,¹⁸ Satan finds fault with the temporality of the edict. He is annoyed by its *novelty*. In the midnight speech to his best friend, he speaks of "the decree / Of yesterday, so late" (v.674–75), then the adjective *new* appears four times in three lines (v.679–81), twice as "New laws." The detail is revealing, for in the first rebellious council, the problem of freedom will very soon give way to the more fundamental issue of origin when Abdiel opposes Satan's "argument blasphemous, false, and proud" (v.809). "[T]he fervent angel" (v.849) reasons that obedience to the Son does not infringe upon angelic liberty because all the heavenly hosts are a priori his inferiors by virtue of being his creations. While Satan's initial problem seems to be the postulate of the Son's *a priori* lordship, the last issue becomes his real sticking point. Characteristically, he challenges Abdiel's interpretation of the past on the grounds of its innovation and argues its falsity on the force of his own memory as decisive evidence, subjecting time to his own person.

That we were formed then sayst thou? . . .

. . . Strange point and new!

Doctrine which we would know whence learned: who saw

When this creation was? Rememberst thou

Thy making, while the maker gave thee being?

We know no time when we were not as now;

Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised

By our own quickening power. . .

(v.853–61)

18. It has long been recognised that Milton operated with a twofold distinction as regards the Son's anointing. On the one hand, he subscribed to a graded understanding of the generation of the Son; on the other, Milton distinguished between a literal and a metaphoric sense of begetting. Literally, it means the production of the Son; metaphorically, his exaltation, usually interpreted with reference to the resurrection. See William B. Hunter, C.A. Patrides and J.H. Adamson, *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971) and cf. Frye, pp. 33–34, and John C. Ulreich, " 'Substantially Expressed': Milton's Doctrine of the Incarnation," *Milton Studies* 39 (2000) 101–28, esp. pp. 110 and 121. For Milton's own position presupposed in these interpretations, see, without prejudice to the work's (in)authenticity, his *De Doctrina Christiana* i.5, esp. *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953–1982) 6:205–206. The underlying biblical prooftexts include Psalms 2 and 8, esp. 2:7 and 8:6–7; and Hebrews 1–2, esp. 1:5 and 2:6–9.

Adam exhibited sharper insight and greater mental powers in the account of his own waking to life (viii.253–360). Not that Satan’s failure here would be merely intellectual inadequacy. On the contrary, he is effectively making divine claims. He does not in fact juxtapose old, and precisely therefore temporal, custom with new law. Rather, what he challenges is the very creation of time. He denies that deathless life is still temporal existence. He refuses to recognise the distinction between immortality and eternity, perhaps the highest creaturely gift and a divine trait.¹⁹ He is thus making a claim of eternity for himself, and repeats it variously in this short text. The denial of createdness in three rhetorical questions (v.856–58), the claims of time-indifference (859) and of absolute priority, both ontological and temporal, as well as the titles of unconditional self-sufficiency (860) are all restatements of the same idea, and all amount to blasphemy. The significant point is that Satan formulates his sacrilegious boast by declaring his own transcendence over time. It will be his punishment that his desire is granted. Two further characteristics of this scene will be important for the temporality of fallen angels. First, at the heart of the devils’ enterprise is a reinterpretation of the past, with disastrous consequences for the present and future. In this case, future obedience is denied to the Son because of present liberty predicated on past equality (if not superiority). The whole edifice collapses when one realises that the ultimate premise about the past is false, but that is what the devils never do. Second, the reinterpretation of the past is highly subjective, and the closed world of satanic subjectivity, that will be their fallen predicament for ever, is shown here for the first time in its full rigour. The dogma of the rebels’ eternity is proved by their own experience: from within, as it were. The failure to transcend their subjective selves leads to the elevation of that limitation to the level of existential principle. All their later reasoning will be equally circular. That Satan is not alone in all this is shown not merely by his plural usage but by the fact that Abdiel’s zeal was “out of season judged” (v.850) by all: it was found temporally inadequate.

19. Cf. God to Adam, “Who am alone / From all eternity” (viii.405–06). The satanic doctrine is clearly refuted in the larger epic scheme. In book iii, God (iii.100–02), the bard joining the angelic choir (iii.374, 390–91), and Uriel (iii.705) all bear out Abdiel’s truth explicitly or implicitly. Satan’s similar admission in the Niphates soliloquy (iv.43–44) is even more important (cf. also ix.145–47). Further, the Father (v.601), Satan (v.772) and Abdiel (v.840) all address their listeners with an allusion, on which cf. Fowler² 319 and 335, to Colossians 1:16 as “Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers,” implicitly confirming the Son’s creative role.

As a result of their rebellion, Satan and his cohort fall “Into utter darkness” (vi.614).²⁰ The verdict is carried out literally at the end of book vi, but Milton depicts it on an existential level throughout the epic. The devils undergo gradual decay, which is, of course, a temporal process. As such, ontologically, it is a brilliant illustration how wrong their initial boast was. Narratively, what they have become with their fall is shown through its effects revealed in time.²¹ Milton can all the more effectively employ this technique as the narrative and chronological discrepancies all but disappear in this regard. Little beyond the very principle is asserted in book vi while the arc from i to x will be carefully drawn. Satan’s first address to Beelzebub (i.84–87) and the deputy’s gloomy summary of the general situation (i.141) begin, understandably rather pessimistically, articulating the doctrine. The graduality of the decay is then declared by the narrator in describing Satan’s appearance to the assembled hosts, “their visages and stature as of gods” (i.570):

his form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than an archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured. . . (i.591–94)

The point is insisted upon time and again in book ii. Beelzebub is “majestic though in ruin” (ii.305). A narratorial reflection on human pride states that damned spirits do not “lose all their virtue” (ii.483). Their song is “partial, but the harmony / (What could it less when spirits immortal sing?) / Suspended hell” (ii.552–54). In the paradisaical scene, Zephon assaults Satan with the same point (iv.835–40), and in the narration of the war in heaven, Raphael explains to Adam why the rebels had difficulty freeing themselves from beneath the hills piled on them: “though spirits of purest light, / Purest first, now gross by sinning grown” (vi.660–61). This is chronologically the earliest phase of the decay, but Raphael’s phrasing fits neatly into the larger pattern the reader can discern by moving from early to later books. Growing “gross” strikes me as a lower stage on the slope than the dimming of excess glory or the partial eclipse of majesty.

20. Fowler², p. 321 glosses the adjective as “outer,” but I see no reason so to restrict the meaning and destroy the pun. Of the early editors, the extravagant Richard Bentley is alone in feeling the need to reduce the ambiguity: see his *Paradise Lost: A New Edition* (London, 1732) 169 (marginalia ad v.614).

21. For this principle of “description by story telling,” cf. Hans H. Schmid, “A bibliai terem-téstörténet – ma,” trans. Zoltán Endreffy, *Diakónia* 6:1 (1984) 25–30, p. 29.

That is not to say that time is bad. It is a gift that can be abused; it is a potentiality that may or may not be realised. The perceiving mind endows it with significance. “[T]he conceptions of time . . . exist on different levels, depending on the intelligence of the conceiving mind.”²⁴ Paradisal time is good because it is viewed as God’s time, who is the source of all that is good. The curse of time for the disloyal angels, and through that hell, is depicted by Milton by their comprehending it as a limit, something negative. Satan and his followers perceive time, as well as being, as a prison. Most notably their dominant temporal unit is the hour whereas in heaven time is structured in days.²⁵ “To the devils below mankind,” writes Northrop Frye, “time is pure clock time, or simply one moment after another.”²⁶ As time closes in on the fallen angels, so does existence. They cannot think of not being. As their heresy was to claim eternal being, the fulfilment of that wish is their torture. Whenever they try, and try they do repeatedly, to consider what options they have open for the future, the devils always stumble against the wall of existence. Of course, Satan often derives apparent optimism from the fact that angels, as they believe, cannot cease to be.²⁷ He asserts in the very first speech in hell that the cherubim’s “empyrean substance cannot fail” (i.117). Beelzebub, on the other hand, can draw no solace from the fact, then and there a first-hand experience, that in the case of “gods and heavenly essences / . . . the mind and spirit remains / Invincible, and vigour soon returns” (i.138–40), for “what if our conqueror”

Have left us this spirit and strength entire
 Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
 That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,

 What can it then avail though yet we feel
 Strength undiminished, or eternal being
 To undergo eternal punishment? (i.143–55)

24. Frye, p. 39.

25. Not only creation but the war in heaven and other major heavenly events are prominently measured in days. It is also the form of God’s law. We have seen that the punishments threatened for insubordination to the Son in heaven or for violation of the forbidden tree on earth are formulated in days; cf. also ii.694–95 and x.576, and for the ambiguity and negative connotations of *hour*, see i.697; ii.91, 526–27, 796–97, 846–48, 934, 1055; vi.396–97; ix.406–07, 780, 937, 1067; x.440; xii.549.

26. Frye, p. 36.

27. Cf. e.g. i.657–59, ii.12–14, vi.433–36; also the more doubtful i.317–18.

Angels have interminable existence, so the argument goes, but only because through their eternal substance can God's unremitting wrath be exercised. The point is raised again in the infernal council, and the same arguments are played out once more as between the rebel leaders: another indication of the closed world of fallen angels.

In his 'keynote address,' Satan argues from the premise, one of his central tenets, that "no deep within her gulf can hold / Immortal vigour" (ii.12–13), obviously referencing the angels' vitality even in their fallenness. Moloch is rather uncertain. God's "utmost ire," he weighs the options,

Will either consume us, and reduce
To nothing this essential, happier far
Than miserable to have eternal being:
Or if our substance be indeed divine,
And cannot cease to be, we are at worst
On this side nothing. . .

(ii.95–101)

Apparently, Moloch genuinely hesitates between the possibilities of angelic extinction and eternity. The more rhetorically emphatic end position in which the latter view is placed suggests his greater inclination towards it. In any case, he is a militant spirit, excelling in deeds of war, not a very sophisticated or highly sensitive intellectual. Belial's response, a good deal more refined speech, attacks his argument point by point, not omitting a reference to angelic immortality. Given God's superior strength, so Belial, a renewed military attempt on his throne will cause him to

spend all his rage,
And that must end us, that must be our cure,
To be no more; sad cure; for who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated night,
Devoid of sense and motion? and who knows,
Let this be good, whether our angry foe
Can give it, or will ever? How he can
Is doubtful; that he never will is sure.

(ii.144–54)

In other words, it is an ontologically open question whether angels are at all destructible, but even if that can be answered in the affirmative, God will make sure it never

happens, for his aim is punishment, and prolonged suffering is worse than non-existence. He will not “give his enemies their wish, and end / Them in his anger, whom his anger saves / To punish endless” (ii.157–59).²⁸ That was precisely Beelzebub’s point.

Interestingly, though, annihilation is not altogether denied. The “graceful and humane” (ii.109) devil locates non-existence in “the wide womb of uncreated night” (ii.150). Since, “in the later demonic theology, time and space are the official creative forces of the world,”²⁹ non-being is only imaginable where they are lost, that is, in chaos. The point is endorsed by Satan some three hundred lines later in his offer to spy out the new created world. Describing the difficulties that the volunteer must face, he says,

These [hell gates] passed, if any pass, the void profound
Of unessential night receives him next
Wide gaping, and with utter loss of being
Threatens him, plunged in the abortive gulf. (ii.438–41)

Neither Belial nor Satan seems, however, seriously to believe in this view. Belial concludes that God will not uncreate them, and Satan is really patting himself on the back.

All the vain speculation of the devils is thrown into sharp relief by a twofold retrospective dramatic irony. On the one hand, we have seen that the correct doctrine is learned from the loyal angels in the central books. The celestial hosts are not eternal but immortal, created and, at least in principle, exterminable. Whether that is God’s ultimate plan is a secret hidden from created eyes, but that it is within his power is indubitable. Every member of the hellish crew is wrong, then. Either because they overestimate the endurance of angelic substance, or because they underestimate the gift of immortality. Ultimately, nothingness might be worse than suffering. There is nothing to suggest that Raphael and Abdiel were instructed by special revelation. More likely, their grasp of angelic ontology is common to all in heaven; every angel knows what they do. That “Heaven’s fugitives” (ii.57) can no longer recall it is an eloquent sign of their memory’s corruption, whether wilful or involuntary.

The second aspect of the dramatic irony is the gradual unfolding of God’s plan. We first learn that the fallen angels will not find grace (iii.129–32), then that their punishment is to be cast out “without redemption, without end” (v.615), and finally

²⁸. Cf. ii.126–27, 182–86.

²⁹. Frye, p. 35.

that once happiness was “fondly lost,” immortality “served but to eternize woe” (xi.59–60). Angelic substance is not innately eternal; in what the devils revel is in fact God’s punishment. God gives them their choice and lets their existence turn in on itself, from which there is no way out. The eternal damnation of the devils was a theological commonplace in Renaissance thought.³⁰ Milton upholds the doctrine but makes it very clear that it is not so by necessity but by God’s sovereign will. Further, he does provide a brilliant metaphoric representation of the rebels’ annihilation. Their names are blotted out of the celestial records.³¹

What we see here is a complex duality that Milton maintains with respect to the fallen angels’ temporal status. On the one hand, they are locked up in time and their own existence, unable to pass through the ultimate remedy, death. On the other hand, they have abused their freedom and are therefore outside time which is no longer a potentiality for them, either to fall or to be redeemed. They are simultaneously fallen into, and out of, time. This paradox is fundamental to understanding their predicament. Milton cannot avoid talking about the fallen angels, their doings and thinking, in time. This is a narrative difficulty impossible to escape. But it is perhaps best understood with the help of Schmid’s principle. When he wants to describe what the fallen angels’ world is like, Milton narrates the events that take place in it. Further, he devises some ways, beyond the metaphor of blotting out of their names, to indicate their position outside time. Among such strategies are their depiction beyond change, and their internalisation of hell, the spatial coordinates within which the horrid crew is confined.

Beyond change: out of time

Satan best illustrates the fact that the disloyal angels are beyond hope of change, at least change in a more than mechanical sense. Right at the beginning of his hellish career, in his very first speech in the entire poem, Satan makes that clear. Addressing his deputy, recalling their happier celestial state, and talking of “the force of those dire arms” of the Son – though as if they had been the Father’s – he says,

Yet not for those
Nor what the potent victor in his rage

30. Cf. Fowler², p. 117 (ad ii.159–61).

31. See i.361–63 and cf. v.760–62, vii.131–33, x.425–26, and John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 67–132.

Can else inflict, do I repent or change,
Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind
And high disdain. . . (i.94–98)

The same unchangeability, implicitly a divine claim, is the trait with which he identifies himself as he takes possession of his new abode. In the inaugural speech to hell, he makes the sweeping claim, based on Amaury de Bene's medieval heresy that heaven and hell are states of mind,³² that he is not only outside time but also detached from space.

[H]ail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest hell
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what should I be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free. . . (i.250–59)

Here we see again the subordination of external reality to his own subjectivity. The somewhat unexpected upshot of that is that Satan's boastful assertion is built on very shaky foundations, on the foundations of his own integrity. The clause "if I be still the same" lies at the heart of the argument, and the archfiend speaks truer than he intends. Cast out from God through his disloyalty, "fallen, to disobedience fallen, / And so from heaven to deepest hell" (v.541–42), he is not his former self any more. The point will be driven home to him rather forcefully by Zephon during their encounter in paradise.³³

Satan's notion of liberty is, conversely and erroneously, place-bound. Soon he has to learn, and admit if only to himself, that his freedom is restricted to creating hell out of heaven but not vice versa. His mind indeed seems to be unchanged by place or time, but his mind is apparently unchangeable altogether. In the Niphates soliloquy (iv.32–113), Satan comes as close to repentance and change as he ever can,

32. Fowler², p. 76 (ad i.255).

33. "Think not, revolted spirit, thy shape the same, / Or undiminished brightness, to be known / As when thou stoodst in heaven upright and pure" (iv.835–37).

but, the beneficial workings of prevenient grace denied, he ends with a hardened heart and reconfirmed resolution to spite God.

So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my good; by thee at least
Divided empire with heaven's king I hold
By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign. . . (iv.108–12)

He, like his peers, can only think of “feigned submission” (iv.96).³⁴ That would be only pretence, the *appearance* of inward change, and as such would not do. He is right in that. But he is unable even to seriously entertain the thought of genuine change. That fact finds a splendid expression in the bard's introduction to his private speech. It presents the foregone conclusion of his deliberations, undermining not their trustworthiness but their efficacy. Unlike Satan himself, the reader knows where he will end up even before he starts. He cannot escape from himself.

[H]orror and doubt distract
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
The hell within him, for within him hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from hell
One step no more than from himself can fly
By change of place. . . (iv.18–23)

Satan's cry of utter despair, “Which way I fly is hell; my self am hell” (iv.75), is but an epigrammatic summary of the bard's words. The doctrine is reiterated much later, in book ix before the temptation scene: “But the hot hell that always in him burns, / Though in mid-heaven, soon ended his delight” (ix.467–68). His mind is truly its own place, but as his – and thus its – place after his fall is ordained by God to be hell, it “back recoils / Upon himself” (iv.17–18), and his mind, in turn, is to be hell.

Being unable to change, the mutinous angels are no longer really alive, nor are they properly in time any more. They are like Swift's Struldbruggs in *Gulliver's Travels*, who, “whenever they see a funeral, they lament and repine that others are gone to an harbour of rest, to which they themselves never can hope to arrive.”³⁵ Pushing a

34. Cf. Mammon's speech in i.237–52 and Beelzebub's in i.335–40.

35. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) in *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings by Jonathan Swift*, ed. Miriam K. Starkman (1962; New York etc.: Bantam Books, 1986) 206.

step further my distinction between eternity and immortality, Northrop Frye avers that the devils' fate is to live perpetually in a fallen world, "[T]he devils cannot die because they cannot make the act of surrender involved in death: hence what they have is a kind of parody of immortality. They are not really immortal; they are merely undying."³⁶ I think their undying can justly be viewed as that of the Struldbruggs, who, over eighty, "are looked on as dead in law."³⁷ The theological overtones are difficult not to hear in the Miltonic context. "For I through the law am dead to the law," writes Saint Paul to the Galatians (2:19).³⁸ The unfaithful angels are, then, beyond hope of change and not within the kingdom of life whose source is God, "their names . . . / . . . blotted out and razed / By their rebellion, from the books of life" (i.361–63).³⁹ It must then follow that they are outside time, too. In the Miltonic universe, time is both the potentiality to fall and the potentiality to be redeemed. Time works neither, but it creates the possibility of both – but with a crucial difference. The change from the active to the passive voice between *to fall* and *to be redeemed* is an accurate indicator of the freedom, and thus the scope of agency, the subject possesses under the respective conditions. Or as Milton's God puts it, "I formed them free, and free they must remain, / Till they enthral themselves" (iii.124–25). Unable to set themselves free, with redemption denied from outside, the devils must remain perpetually enthralled and thus without time.

A further detail to register about the devils' quandary is that Satan's time-indifference is characterised in terms similar to, but certainly not identical with, that of God. What is not in time Milton depicts in space. Satan's damnation is eternal because hell is inseparable from him; the temporal infinitude is expressed in terms of spatial identity. God's eternity, which has existential relevance, is expressed in spatial terms; he is portrayed above time.⁴⁰ The spatial quality of Satan's being outside

Incidentally, a careful reading of the Struldbruggs' description in the second half of part iii ("A voyage to Laputa. . ."), chapter 10 can prove a highly instructive exercise with its remarkable similarities to Milton's devils.

36. Frye, pp. 81–82.

37. Swift, p. 206.

38. See also Romans 7:9: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Bible quotations are from the King James Version, cited from *BibliaTéka CD-ROM: A bibliatudomány elektronikus könyvtára* (Budapest: Arcanum, n.d.).

39. Although I take this to be a metaphoric representation of their annihilation, I certainly do not deny that they actually exist; cf. Leonard, pp. 145–46 vs. Fish, p. 337.

40. Cf. esp. iii.56–79 and vi.4–12.

time, in hell, is rendered in existential terms; his hell is psychologically internalised. God's realm is infinity and perfect freedom; Satan's world is the narrow confines of the self and the total loss of liberty. The universe with its unthinkable entirety is contained and incorporated in God. Satan's universe is turned inside out, or rather outside in, and it is locked up within the impenetrable dungeon of his subject. "He finds himself walled in by the jail of his individuality."⁴¹ God turned himself into a world or, indeed, a part of himself into many worlds.⁴² Satan turns the boundless vastness of the cosmos into the prison of his psyche. It is in this sense that Satan, while having fallen out of time, is still locked up in it.

Another way in which Milton depicts the devils beyond change is through their knowledge of time. Talking of their memory and foresight, Valerie Carnes notices an inability to transcend time.

Because he has lost the redemptive powers of memory and of foresight alike, Satan sees times as essentially static. The only temporal values which he recognizes are those of the present, the immediate past and the immediate future.⁴³

It is true that Satan is not very much concerned with his doom "understood / Not instant, but of future time" (x.344–45), nor has he, or any other devil for that matter, appreciably unerring foreknowledge of events to come. So they may have lost *the redemptive powers* of memory and foresight, but they certainly did not lose their *faculty* of memory. And, I presume, they very much cherish the value of the past as they interpret it. Their memories are clouded and confused, but it is in fact part of their punishment that they should remember. The Lethean stream "flies / All taste of living wight, as once it fled / The lip of Tantalus" (ii.612–14) when they attempt to drink the water of forgetfulness.

Probably the most unmistakable indication of the fallen angels' memory is their continual adherence to their original titles. Speakers of public utterances in hell frequently address their audiences with their former celestial titles as does Satan in his first call: "Princes, potentates, / Warriors, the flower of heaven, once yours, now lost" (i.315–16).⁴⁴ In one form or another, every speaker alludes to their former glorious state.⁴⁵ In fact, the main task of the fallen angels on regaining consciousness in hell is to come to terms with the past. They may, indeed, think that past more immediate

41. Frye, p. 81.

42. Cf. i.650, ii.915–16, iii.565–67, v.268, vii.168–72, 620–22, viii.148–49.

43. Valerie Carnes, "Time and Language in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *ELH* 37 (1970) 517–39, p. 527.

44. Cf. i.622–23; ii.11, 310–13, 391, 430.

45. Cf. i.84–105, 128–42, 157, 244–50, 272–78; ii.57, 165–69, 263–68.

than it is as they do not seem to remember anything of the nine-day period between their fall and the epic's opening scene. William Empson comments on i.169–77,

Satan remembers for ten lines what happened while they were falling from Heaven, and ignores the chains altogether. But he imagines that the pursuing troops have only just been recalled; the rebels are as if emerging from a drug, and remember nothing of the intervening period.⁴⁶

But that is not the only instance of devilish amnesia. An even more remarkable instance is Satan's apparent forgetfulness of his own family, whom he finds at hell's gate. The scene provides arguably the most spectacular illustration of the significance of apostrophes in Satan and Death's power game at the end of book ii.⁴⁷ The archfiend's boastful self-assertion "Retire, or taste thy folly, and learn by proof, / Hell-born, not to contend with spirits of heaven" (ii.686–87) is answered to by Death's contemptuous "Hell-doomed" (ii.697) and "False fugitive" (ii.700), the latter echoing Moloch's "Heaven's fugitives" (ii.57). A further clash of titles, or rather another hit at Satan's vanity, is Death's claim of sovereignty in hell: "Where I reign king, and to enrage thee more, / Thy king and lord" (ii.698–99). Satan ought to realise that his perception of the situation falls somewhat short of precision.

But to return to the infernal council, it is almost possible to read its story as the minutes of a historical symposium. If so read, it will be noticed that the proceedings are subject to political interests. What is more, the debating historians have no other access to the past than their memory, which is fallen, too. The historical analysis they perform in books i–ii moves in a full circle from Satan's initial addresses, which deny the finality of their fallenness (the present state of it is impossible not to admit), through Belial and Mammon advocating "ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth" (ii.227), to Beelzebub's return to Satan's original idea of corrupting the newly created world. Again, Satan's definition of an objective state of affairs, victory and defeat in a war, is subjectivised, and the fact is denied on the basis of his own rejection to accept it.

All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome? (i.106–09)

46. William Empson, *Milton's God* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961) 43.

47. For similar episodes, see Ithuriel and Zephon's (esp. iv.823–35), Gabriel's (esp. iv.920–21, 926, 971) Abdiel's (esp. v.877–78; vi.131, 135, 152, 167, 172) and Michael's (esp. vi.262–63) encounters with Satan, some of which I will discuss below; cf. Leonard, pp. 50–85, 119–32.

“In *Paradise Lost*,” writes E.J. Wood, “not only Satan, but all those who follow him move in the rigidly prescribed circles of their own fallacious vision.”⁴⁸ The observation is certainly true of their vision of time, past as well as future. Thus Satan ends up, like later Adam (x.137–43), blaming God for his own sin.

But he who reigns
 Monarch in heaven, till then as one secure
 Sat on his throne, upheld by old repute,
 Consent or custom, and his regal state
 Put forth at full, but still his strength concealed,
 Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall.

(i.637–42)

This is in fact the theoretical foundation of all that is to follow. Because God is to blame, the angels’ just cause is to be pursued. The question to decide is not *whether* they should oppose the almighty, but *how* they should do it. Satan leaves no doubt. The point is clearly made in both his summoning and opening speeches of the hellish convention: “peace is despaired, / For who can think of submission? War then, war / Open or understood must be resolved” (i.660–61).⁴⁹

The first speaker Moloch’s “sentence is for open war” (ii.51). His argument is based on historical evidence as anybody else’s. His logic is rather simple. Hell is a pretty bad place, the worst conceivable in fact, so there is nothing to lose, and, being no sophist himself, he would attack God’s hosts head-on again. It is exactly his interpretation of the historical facts that provokes Belial’s and Mammon’s more cautious stratagems. What is interesting about their speeches is that they present a far more factual analysis of the past than Moloch’s, and they articulate transcendental truths whose validity the reader either knows or will shortly learn from the remaining portions of *Paradise Lost*. Belial acknowledges God’s omniscience (ii.189–93). They are also fully aware that God is unpollutable, invincible, and omnipotent.⁵⁰ They even suppose that he “in time may much remit / His anger” (ii.210–11). Their vision is closed, nonetheless. Like other fallen angels, Belial and Mammon cannot think of genuine repentance and it does not occur to them that God may forgive their rebel-

48. Elizabeth J. Wood, “‘Improv’d by Tract of Time’: Metaphysics and Measurement in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 15 (1981) 43–58, p. 49.

49. Cf. also ii.37–42: “we now return / To claim our just inheritance of old, / . . . and by what best way, / Whether of open war or covert guile, / We now debate: who can advise, may speak.”

50. Cf. ii.137–42, 144, 198–99, 231–35, 264.

lion. Consequently, their proposals cannot possibly present a solid alternative to continued resistance of God's order. The conference arrives at its foregone conclusion with Beelzebub's help (ii.310–78). His argument is based on a critical analysis of historical facts allegedly mistakenly presented by those who spoke before him. Hell is not out of God's jurisdiction, it is not meant to be a safe haven for them. Nor is there any hope, as is evidenced by past experience, to wage a successful war against heaven. The only option left, the argument springs from a piece of historical knowledge yet once more, is to discover the truth of the "ancient and prophetic fame" (ii.346) and to revenge themselves on the inhabitants of the new world. The circle is thus completed and Satan's suggestion approved of.⁵¹

What is true of the infernal council, namely, that historical considerations are dominated by political aims or, in other words, that the past is subordinated to the future, seems also true in the more general terms of satanic public remembrance.⁵² For instance, the past serves to justify Satan's proposed corruption of the new world because it shall be thereby reformed to its "original darkness" and "the standard . . . of ancient Night" will be erected there "once more" (ii.984–86). The fallen angels do remember a great many things, even from the remote past. Their memory of the old prophecy is apparently correct; they can recall various details of the war in heaven; they can pretty well recollect the particulars of their actual fall (though not, it seems,

51. Cf. i.650–56: "Space may produce new worlds; whereof so rife / There went a fame in heaven that he ere long / Intended to create, and therein to plant / A generation, whom his choice regard / Should favour equal to the sons of heaven: / Thither, if but to pry, shall be perhaps / Our first eruption." Allen H. Gilbert sees different compositional strata in the various references to God's plan to create humankind, and would not admit deliberate circularity in the narrative structure (*On the Composition of Paradise Lost: A Study of the Ordering and Insertion of Material* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947) 131–35, sec. 40). Gary Anderson, on the other hand, argues for a carefully devised christological-soteriological pattern in the chronology of fame of intended creation–anointing of Son–creation of humans ("The Fall of Satan in the Thought of St. Ephrem and John Milton," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3:1 (Jan 2000) online journal at <http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/>). Historical criticism is often at cross-purposes with canonical criticism.

52. Instances of private remembering are far less numerous and are treated elsewhere. Thus I have already mentioned Satan's admission of his createdness in the Niphates soliloquy (iv.43–44) while his non-recognition of Sin (ii.744–45), briefly alluded to above, will be treated below in more detail. What is to be noted here is the existence of independent evidence (in the form of narratorial comments like i.55, ii.294–95, iv.24) that the devils remember and the fact, amply demonstrated by Satan's encounter with Sin, that their memory is certainly not impeccable.

of the intervening period of nine days while they “Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,” i.52). As a rule, however, their memories, because they are frequently manipulated according to political ends, are not really trustworthy. Unless their recollections can be supported by independent evidence from more reliable sources, one reads them with reservations like Satan’s genealogy of his reign.

Me though just right, and the fixed laws of heaven
 Did first create your leader, next free choice,
 With what besides, in council or in fight,
 Hath been achieved of merit, yet this loss
 Thus far at least recovered, hath much more
 Established in a safe unenvied throne
 Yielded with full consent. (ii.18–24)

The laws of heaven creating Satan a leader are, conspicuously, “fixed,” as opposed to the emphatically “new laws” of the anointing.⁵³ Once more, the past is invoked and considered not in preparation to, but in manipulative justification of, the future. The paradisaical order of past and future is reversed. Abdiel penetrates into the heart of this perversion, early in the course of fallen angelic history but relatively late in poem time. Having given up on Satan’s conversion, he momentarily adopts the satanic logic to understand the past through the future and makes his point in such terms: “Then who created thee lamenting learn, / When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know” (v.894–95). Satan is refuted on his own grounds.

Fallen angels’ foreknowledge

The good angels’ foreknowledge was based on their proper understanding of the past and their faith. The rebels have neither, so they must by necessity be ignorant of the future.

Just as Satan has not God’s perspective of space, he has not God’s perspective of time. Satan cannot have foreknowledge, and thus his attempts on man are true attempts, in that he cannot know, in spite of his supernatural craft, success or failure.

⁵³ Cf. v.674–81. Martin finds “Satan’s irreversible attachment . . . prejudicial to creative order” (p. 79).

So much more powerful and sophisticated than Adam, Satan knows no more of the future than he. Indeed, he knows less.⁵⁴

There is plentiful illustration for this thesis in the epic. While roaming on the surface of earth, Satan is repeatedly shown as hoping to achieve something by good luck. He learns by accident of the interdicted tree (iv.512–22) then he walks round the garden because he thinks,

A chance but chance may lead where I may meet
Some wandering spirit of heaven, by fountain side,
Or in thick shade retired, from him to draw
What further would be learned. (iv.530–33)

Later he sets out, already in the serpent, on a quest to find Adam and/or Eve.

He sought them both, but wished his hap might find
Eve separate, he wished, but not with hope
Of what so seldom chanced, when to his wish,
Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies. . . (ix.421–24)⁵⁵

Fowler notes that “in Satan’s world picture, events usually occur either by necessity or by *hap* (chance).”⁵⁶ It is precisely “necessity and chance [that] / Approach not” God, whose will is fate (vii.172–73). Leaving aside the problem of how exactly necessity and fate interrelate, the prominent role assigned to the latter in infernal ideology should not go unnoticed. It is also illuminating that almost half of all occur-

54. Rosalie L. Colie, “Time and Eternity: Paradox and Structure in *Paradise Lost*,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23 (1960) 127–38, p. 131.

55. By some commentators even Satan’s weeklong roaming around earth (ix.63–69) has been interpreted as a random search whose purpose was, at least in part, to find (an entrance to) Eden; see Jonathan Richardson, *Father and Son, Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton’s Paradise Lost* (London, 1734) 395–96, ad ix.76; Gunnar Qvarnström, *The Enchanted Palace: Some Aspects of Paradise Lost* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967) 39; and Sherry L. Zivley, “Satan in Orbit: *Paradise Lost* IX.48–86,” *Milton Quarterly* 31:4 (1997) 130–36, esp. pp. 133–34. This reading seems to me no less conjectural than Malabika Sarkar’s contrary view of “Satan’s movements show[ing] knowledge and perfect control” (“Satan’s Astronomical Journey, *Paradise Lost*, IX.63–66,” *N&Q* 26:5 [vol. 224 of cont. ser.] (Oct 1979) 417–22, p. 422). Since she also takes Satan’s purposefulness to be a hard-won confidence, even these dubious critical positions can serve to indicate how widely Satan’s spatial and temporal disorientation has been perceived.

56. Fowler², p. 493.

rences of *fate* come in the first two books, notably in the second. It is by fate that “the strength of gods [read, angels] / . . . cannot fail” (i.116–17), that God can maintain “his high supremacy” (i.133), or that the rebels are subdued (ii.197–98).⁵⁷ The devils, of course, speak truthfully when they ascribe sovereign traits to fate, but they conceive of it in autonomous terms, denying (or at least passing over in silence) its origin in God’s will. “[T]hey abstract the will of God into fatalism,” summarises Northrop Frye the devilish move.⁵⁸ The transmutation has temporal overtones. The living, dynamic though eternal will of God that both creates time and expresses itself in it (consider the history of Israel or the incarnation) is replaced with an impersonal, rigid concept that freezes time. The shift is quite emblematic of Satan and his cronies’ predicament.

All the strategies outlined in the hellish conference are conjectures at the future. Despite Satan’s conceited claim, rendered ridiculous by the retrospective dramatic irony, that after their fall the rebels are “in foresight much advanced” (i.119), the predictions naturally contradict each other though they all begin with the same premise: God is to be fought against. Will God remit his anger or will he not? Will the devils be consumed by his wrath or are they imperishable? Can they storm heaven’s high walls or is the almighty’s stronghold unapproachable? Does he only reign by their delay or is he invincible anyway? The confusion as to what might ensue demonstrates the futility of the enterprise at the very outset. While Beelzebub *hopes* that if they succeed in seducing the inhabitants of the new world “their God / *May* prove their foe, and with repenting hand / Abolish his own works” (ii.368–70),⁵⁹ God not only *knows* that they *will* fall but also that he will be merciful to them. Beelzebub’s presumption that God’s joy can be interrupted (ii.371) betrays how little he knows the nature of the almighty – and of eternity.

The futility of any action aimed in God’s spite was, chronologically, and will be, narratively, proved by the war in heaven. There the rebels’ plans are time and again uncovered as fully known to their enemies, and the result is a stupefyingly awkward situation for them. Raphael tells Adam of the insurgents’ intentions:

57. Cf. further ii.232, 393, 550, 559–60, 610, 809.

58. Frye, p. 34.

59. My italics. Fowler², p. 127 (ad ii.369–70) notes a reference to Genesis 6:7: “And the Lord said, I will destroy men whom I have created from the face of the earth; . . . for it repenteth me that I have made them.” The list could be extended: Jeremiah 18:8–10, 26:3; Jonah 3:10. But cf. also: 1 Samuel 15:28–29, Psalm 110:4, Romans 11:29.

lenge both God's infinite perfection and his foreknowledge. The whole edifice is built, however, on the shaky grounds of wishful thinking. There is no creaturely way from one day to endless days. The chasm between time and eternity is infinite; no induction will bridge it. Also appears the usual pattern of a past distorted in order to justify a wished-for future, whose prognostication is patently wrong. As the rebels, too, will soon be forced to realise, God has neither deployed his most powerful forces, nor has he (mis)judged his army to be sufficient to subdue the foe.⁶⁰ Of course, the forecast of his future weakness is equally pathetic.

There are, nevertheless, a few other predictions of Satan for the future that turn out to be correct, notably those which speculate on the fall of humans.⁶¹ That, however, proves nothing beyond the strength of God's permissive will. Satan is on the whole no more sure, in fact he is less certain, of the fall of humans than he was of his own victory over God. He keeps making evil forecasts, simply prognosticating the success of his plans, which come true apparently randomly. More truly, they are governed by God's will, of which he is entirely ignorant, and his occasionally correct precognition cannot be regarded more than accidental from his point of view.

The fallen angels have, then, no foreknowledge at all simply hopes and fears for the future.⁶² God's plans and the order of creation are revealed for the faithful, and through them the righteous may gain prescience as far as they trust in God. The unfaithful have lost their relationship with God and they are therefore left to their own resources, which inevitably produce a circular, closed, self-reflexive world. In it, the understanding of the past is moulded by the fallen intellect's desires for the future, ultimately originating from the subject, and is used in turn to prove the plausibility of that future that determined it in the first place. There is no way out, the devils can indeed find "no end, in wandering mazes lost" (ii.561). While the circularity of their reasoning and the enclosed nature of the resulting hellish universe is masterfully imaged in the self-reflexivity of despair both in the opening and the closing infernal scenes,⁶³ the two episodes possibly mirroring each other, Milton provides a rather surprising counterpoint to infernal self-deception. Sin literally embodies, in more

60. Cf. vi.49, 692–94, 710–14.

61. Cf. e.g. ii.840–44; iv.381–85, 522–27.

62. Cf. the "false presumptuous hope" of ii.522 and Satan's admission to Sin: "dire change / Befallen us unforeseen, unthought of" (ii.820–21).

63. Cf. "and each / In other's countenance read his own dismay / Astonished" (ii.421–23); and "hiss for hiss returned with forked tongue / To forked tongue" (x.518–20) as well as "for what they saw, / They felt themselves now changing" (x.540–41).

ways than one, the corruption of the rebels and their cause,⁶⁴ yet her perception of time is factual and indifferent. From a point of view of literary technique, it is easy to understand. She is an allegorical figure, and allegories are by nature atemporal. But it can also be interpreted from an ontological point of view. Sin is not a moral agent whose sense of time should be clouded as a result of her will's rebellion.

On first encountering them, Satan recognises neither Death nor Sin, "I know thee not, nor ever saw till now / Sight more detestable than him and thee" (ii.744–75). "[I]t is part of the change in Satan that he himself should have forgotten and should not even recognize his sin for what it is."⁶⁵ Sin, by contrast, has an unflinching memory. Conspicuously, she also remembers her beginnings in pretty impressive detail, like Adam and unlike Satan. She carries on with her story, and there is no reason to question her reliability in recalling the particulars of her affairs with both her father and then her son. She also confirms the angelic fall, which swept her, too, out of heaven, and her possession of the keys of hell is in turn confirmed by the narrator.⁶⁶

It has often been noted that Satan, Sin, and Death form an unholy trinity parodying the holy one, which Milton may or may not have rejected.⁶⁷ Yet from the point of view of time and its perception, I think, Sin is also parodying Satan himself.⁶⁸ Sin's past recollections are disinterested, not subject to her future interests. She also makes a point of being an "Inhabitant of heaven and heavenly-born" (ii.860), but does not conclude that she would therefore have any claim on her former state. On the contrary, she goes on to acknowledge Satan as her father, the origin of her being, whom she is to obey.

Thou art my father, thou my author, thou
My being gav'st me; whom should I obey
But thee, whom follow? Thou wilt bring me soon
To that new world of light and bliss, among

64. Sin's body is begotten in the course of the rebellion which it then bodies forth (ii.748–58); her body is disfigured (ii.650–66, 783–85) as the rebellion disfigured the empyrean body politic, and her body has been the locus of unnatural desires turning multiplied on themselves (ii.762–67, 779, 790–95), imaging the self-enclosure of fallen angelic existence.

65. Fowler¹, p. 126 (ad ii.752–61). It ought to be noted, however, that when Satan last saw her she was pleasing and had "attractive graces" (ii.762), but in the meantime, at the birth of Death, her "nether shape . . . grew / Transformed" (ii.784–85).

66. Cf. ii.774–77, 850–53, and 871–79, 883; x.234.

67. See the essays in Hunter, Patrides and Adamson.

68. On a similarly contrapuntal function of Chaos, see Martin, pp. 101–02.

The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign
 At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems
 Thy daughter and thy darling, without end. (ii.864–70)

That is much more than Satan would ever concede to God.

Sin's foreknowledge is also more credible than Satan's. I do not mean to quote the above passage as a proof. In fact, I see it is part of the parody, once more directed not simply against the Son but also Satan, who does not obey his creator and is thus excluded from the world of light and bliss. The irony is that Sin's trust in her false father, in the ethical and not the ontological sense of the adjective, is not disappointed, and the prediction based on that trust, notwithstanding that it is misplaced, comes by and large true. The only erroneous detail is her reign "without end." Sin knew better. She knew that God had ultimate power over her and Death, and that they were his servants. And when she bears that in mind, her foreknowledge of the future is credible. She keeps Death from killing Satan, saying,

What fury, O son,
 Possesses thee to bend that mortal dart
 Against thy father's head? and knowst for whom;
 For him who sits above and laughs the while
 At thee ordained his drudge, to execute
 Whate'er his wrath, which he calls justice, bids,
 His wrath which one day will destroy ye both.
 (ii.728–34)⁶⁹

And again at the end of her introductory speech, Death

knows
 His end with mine involved; and knows that I
 Should prove a bitter morsel, and his bane,
 When ever that shall be; so fate pronounced.
 But thou, O Father, I forewarn thee, shun
 His deadly arrow; neither vainly hope
 To be invulnerable in those bright arms,
 Though tempered heavenly, for that mortal dint,
 Save he who reigns above, none can resist. (ii.806–14)

69. In Milton's world, the reference to God's laughter is probably an authenticating detail; cf. v.733–37 and Psalm 2:4.

There is not much joy in her knowledge, but it is authentic knowledge nonetheless. With respect to fate, she adopts the demonic terminology, but it being the will of God, it is still dependable, especially as she is fully aware of the Father's omnipotence.

After the human fall and the building of the bridge through chaos, Sin forgets about the almighty and becomes too much absorbed in her reign over the newly corrupted world.⁷⁰ She then eulogises Satan (x.354–82) making him equal to God.⁷¹ When the scene is taken up again some two hundred lines later, Sin addresses her son as “all conquering Death” (x.591), and glories in their command of the new empire. It is now that she makes the first and only reference in *Paradise Lost* to “The scythe of time” (x.606). Corruption is otherwise repeatedly associated with sin rather than time. They are now in the fallen world where time is also fallen. When Sin's objectivity is lost, when she forgets that God is almighty, the Father himself delivers a reminder by placing the scene in proper perspective. The powerful rulers of the fallen world, Sin and Death, are identified by God as the “dogs of hell” (x.616), “hell-hounds” that “lick up the draff and filth” (x.630). Their inevitable end is then pronounced again.

“This unskilful allegory” of Sin and Death has been called “one of the greatest faults of the poem.”⁷² Addison was less severe in his stricture, he allowed for the beauty of the allegory but did not think “that Persons of such a chymical Existence [were] proper Actors in an Epic Poem.”⁷³ I think Sin and Death are not only superbly drawn allegorical figures but also have an important structural role in certain ways to contrast Satan. As long as Sin does not fall for the power offered by her father but accepts the role assigned to her by God, her memory and foresight, including knowledge of her origin and limitations, are clear. She thus serves in yet another way to exemplify Milton's wider point that the proper perception of time is dependent on knowing God aright.

70. As usual, Gilbert suspects compositional discrepancy between the allegory's appearance in books ii and x (pp. 127–30, sec. 38).

71. On the possible ironies at the end of the speech (x.381–82) invoking God's ultimate rule over the entire world and thus subverting Satan's equality with him, see Fowler², p. 561 (ad x.381).

72. Dr. Samuel Johnson, “Milton” (1779) in *Samuel Johnson*, ed. Donald Greene (1984; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 698–716, p. 712.

73. Joseph Addison, *Criticism on Milton's Paradise Lost: From “The Spectator” 31 December, 1711–3 May, 1712*, in *English Reprints*, ed. Edward Arber, 8 vols. (London: 1869–1871; repr. New York: AMS, 1966), 2:1–152, p. 23 (No. 273, 12 Jan 1712).